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Gudinski, by Stuart Coupe is a wild and fast ride.

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<https://theconversation.com/gudinski-by-stuart-coupe-is-a-fast-and-wild-tale-of-australias-music-industry-43838>

## Review of Stuart Coupe's Gudinski, published by Hachette Australia, 2015

I must here confess my connection with both writer and subject of the new book [Gudinski](<https://www.hachette.com.au/Books/detail.page?isbn=9780733633102>), by Stuart Coupe.

Stuart Coupe is an author, manager, label-owner and music-lover. We have known one another, a bit, for about 30 years. And Gudinski, the music business entrepreneur and, as per the book's subtitle, "godfather of Australian rock 'n' roll"? We have met a few times. I was in the Go-Betweens when they signed to Gudinski's label in the 80s - a band whose demise, according to this book, he accurately predicted.

I was also once at one of those tour parties at Gudinski's house when I decided to steal something. This is mildly mortifying. 'Twas but a trinket from the pool-room, but compared to what was going on in the kitchen it can most certainly be relegated to the realm of misdemeanor. I still have the trinket.

Coupe has written a book about Gudinski: a man famous for his reluctance to permit such probing. And it is to Coupe's credit that he has mustered all his perseverance and charm in spite of this unwillingness and crafted "the book Gudinski never wanted".

<image id="91255" align="left" source="Hachette Australia" zoomable="true" />

Although the intention is to tell the story of a man rather than a business, the two are never far apart. So it's really the story of the growth of an empire. An ever-expanding interconnected group of companies, somewhat like one of those giant fungi – the world's largest living things – that spread and thrive under the cover of the forest darkness. [Mushroom](<http://mushroomgroup.com/>), then – the company set up by Gudinski in 1973 – was a fitting name.

And Gudinski used it quite a lot: Mushroom Records/ Publishing/Pictures/ Marketing/ Creative/ Promotions have been just some of the arms of the Gudinski octopus of companies. There are many more.

Gudinski is, unsurprisingly, passionate about music. But it's the money to be made from his passion that has been, without a doubt, his driving force. The deals. Deals are done at high speed, in an endorphin rush, the mind spinning around the problem, the solution and the bottom line.

Deals done whilst "vibing", an oft-used Gudinski-ism, which sounds like some sort of water divining and is probably about as accurate. All of this, Coupe captures with empathy and a clear sense of the excitement and risks that are in play.

“The boss” and his inner workings are revealed through interviews from across time with staffers, partners, musicians and friends (all music-biz folk). There is much loyalty. Also, much discussion about loyalty, which tends to colour the entire conversation.

The chapter that deviates, and sheds some light on the broken relationships, is a welcome relief, as are those about the collapse of Mushroom UK and Gudinski’s dealings with the Murdochs.

The bands at the core of this history (Skyhooks, Paul Kelly, Hunters, Split Enz, Barnesy) do get plenty of space, but there is little discussed beyond the business aspects of their relationship with Gudinski.

<image id="91258" align="right" source="Eva Rinaldi" caption="Gudinski at the 2013 Aria Awards, Sydney." zoomable="true" />

Any search for discussion about the artistry or aesthetics of music-making (or selling) is a fruitless one. At the end of the day, Gudinski leaves such thinking, and decision-making, for the others in the organisation. And there are many folk that he clearly relies on for this whole empire to function.

In fact, it may be that the best parts of this book are the tales that aren't about Gudinski, but the stories of people who were chosen and encouraged to pursue their passion within the organisation.

These are the people who actually have stories to tell about the things that matter – the nurturing of artists, the successes and failures on the ground, the risks and chances taken. And Gudinski exists here as a father figure, albeit a fairly gruff one, who seems to do a lot of barking.

Coupe admits, and it is undeniable, that this book is littered with Melbourne bands, Melbourne stories. Gudinski, it seems, understands little outside the fairly narrow rock/beer barn world that he helped create, and the wealth of music that poured out of Australian towns and cities in those fruitful, creative post-punk years is stuff that he admits he has little time for.

This rock world was born of the Melbourne post-blues scene in the 70s, where Gudinski the businessman was born. He made a lot of money in the 80s building a giant structure in thrall to rock, and he used that money through the 90s to keep it from collapsing when, really, rock just wasn’t as popular any more. The internet, grunge and dance music arrived: the world changed.

Cold Chisel manager Rod Willis is succinct in his appraisal of the negotiations involving Gudinski that surrounded the reformation of the band in the 90s and the recording of their new album:

>they say they enjoy the music, and they may or may not. But the thing keeps them in the game is the power.”

It is, indeed, a game.

Stuart Coupe has given us an insight into an industry with which he is intimately acquainted. The book is fast and wild: pick it up in Perth at the airport newsagent - then leave it in the cab in Sydney with your tip.

Like Coupe’s previous effort, *The Promoters LINK (YEAR)*, it is an essential companion to understanding how the Australian music scene works.

In the end, there is little to say about Gudinski except that he exists for the business. It drives him, his attitudes, his relationships. As to the man? This phrase, from Mushroom's Eleanor McKay, sums him up quite beautifully:

>Michael’s charm is that he has no charm. It’s almost endearing.

The stolen trinket, I’ll keep forever. I love music, and spend a good part of every day either listening to it, interpreting it, making it or talking about it. The trinket is a reminder to me that the music industry has very little to do with any of that.

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\_[Gudinski, by Stuart Coupe](<https://www.hachette.com.au/Books/detail.page?isbn=9780733633102>), is published by Hachette Australia\_.